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Keeping It Real

Part 1, The Real Danger of Self-deception

Has someone ever made a fool of you, and I mean on purpose? Has someone ever played a harsh practical joke on you, or have they gossiped about one of your failures, or have you been taken advantage of? If you have been played like a fool, lured along, and taken advantage of, you know how much it can hurt, how it embarrasses you, and how it can even damage your sense of trust. In these painful, yet instructive life experiences, we learn both the definition of and the damaging nature of **hypocrisy**, i.e., of people acting out roles, faking, pretending, being insincere, or just going through the motions.

There was a group of politico-religious leaders in Jesus' day called the Pharisees and according to Jesus, they were the very definition of hypocrites. They were proud and arrogant, hyper-religious (legalistic) law-keepers. They loved their positions and the respect that their positions commanded. Yet Jesus looked through their pious façade and saw a decrepit situation. Jesus explained their real condition using the shocking analogy of a cemetery and its graves. In Matthew 23:27 we read, *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

A cemetery is usually well-kept, mowed, trimmed, and decorated, and it is marked out with beautiful monuments. In ancient Israel, the tombs would even be white-washed—i.e., painted—to make them appear clean and attractive. But we all know what's inside a grave! Jesus said these hypocritical religious leaders were like white-washed tombs. Outwardly they appeared clean, beautiful, upstanding, and righteous. But inside God saw blackened, putrefied hearts, and arrogant and even hateful motives. Their unmasked nature became obvious for all to see when, in jealousy, they devised a plan to crucify the Lord of Glory. These men KNEW that Jesus was from God; Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee, admitted as much when he came to Jesus by night (John 3:2). Yet, these "leaders" were willing to kill an innocent man, even their own Messiah, rather than risk losing their *place* (their jobs and positions as leaders) and their *nation* (their national pseudo-sovereignty) (John 11:48). Yes, hypocrisy is a vile, odious, and offensive condition. We don't like hypocrites; we don't want to be around hypocrites. It's something we can easily see in **others**, and we are repulsed.

But, let me ask a sobering question. Don't hypocrites KNOW they are being hypocritical? Don't they know that they are being two-faced, deceitful, deceptive, odious, and vile? The answer is "Some do!" Our world is full of hypocrites-on-purpose. Their goal is to deceive the simple, the unknowing, and the innocent, and usually rake in the money! I'm speaking here of con men and con women, shysters, crooks, snake oil salesmen, and thieves. Yes, some people are hypocrites... on purpose! But is it a surprise to you that there are those among the general law-abiding populace, who DO NOT recognize their own hypocrisy? It shouldn't be a surprise because every one of us can become hypocritical and remain hypocritical IF we are self-deceived. Israel's ancient prophet Jeremiah was inspired to write this truth about the human heart: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it (Jeremiah 17:9)?*

Even though most people would bristle to hear it, God says that by nature (i.e., by birth), ALL OF US are deceitful and deceived sinners and one of the consequences of this inherent sin nature is spiritual blindness. We so clearly see the faults of others. We see the *mote* (i.e., that tiny bit of sawdust) in our brother's eye, but we are often oblivious to the *beam* (i.e., the 2x4) sticking out of our eye! And here is how it's played out in life... We despise those who gossip about us, but then we readily turn around and gossip ourselves. We despise those who lie about us, but then we turn about and lie about others. We despise those who steal from us, but given the chance, we can and do steal from others (maybe not literally but through infidelity, cheating, and other forms of deception). God says through Jeremiah that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the depth of depravity affecting our OWN hearts! We are like skunks who cannot smell our own stench! Consequently, we must use the mirror of God's Word to reveal to us our true condition. Paul confessed in Romans 7:7, *...I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

Not one of us can be THE standard of righteous living. Jesus is The Standard for righteousness and holy living. Consequently, it's not wise to compare ourselves among ourselves (2 Corinthians 10:12) because we can always find someone in worse shape morally, giving us the excuse to think, "See, I'm not so bad!"

So, friends, may it not be said of us, "There is no fool like an old fool!" Let's keep it real! Let's do some introspection with the Word of God and the life of Jesus as our mirror. Let's ask God to reveal to us those areas of our life, those behaviors, those thoughts, that are hypocritical, to the end that we might repent (i.e., turn from them), and enjoy both the forgiveness of God and a changed life that blesses others.

God bless and consider!